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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2489
INFO USIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: AR, SOPN, SHUM
SUBJECT: ADEPA REPORT ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

SUMMARY: FOR THE SECOND YEAR RUNNING, THE ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER EDITORS ASSOCIATION AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING PUBLICALLY CHARGED THAT THE GOVERNMENT ON ARGENTINA DID NOT RESPECT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND DECLARED THAT PRESS FREEDOM IS A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT THAT THE PEOPLE HAVE NOT DELEGATED TO ANY GOVERNMENT ENTITY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER EDITORS ASSOCIATION (ADEPA) IN ITS ANNUAL REPORT ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED A RESOLUTION ASSERTING THAT "FULL FREEDOM OF THE PRESS DOES NOT EXIST IN ARGENTINA."

2. THE ADEPA RESOLUTION SAID THAT WHILE THE PRESS HAD RESPONDED TO THE GOVERNMENT'S CALL FOR "RESPONSIBILITY AND OBJECTIVITY IN THE HANDLING OF INFORMATION....THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT HAS NOT RESPONDED TO OUR REQUEST FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL CITIZENS WITHOUT EXCEPTION. THIS MUST BE SAID AND WE SAY IT. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT THAT THE PEOPLE

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HAVE NOT DELEGATED TO ANY GOVERNMENT, NATIONAL OR

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/PS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
(X) Release () Excise () Deny
Exemption(s):
Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full Declassify on
() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to
Date Declassify on Reason

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PROVINCIAL."

3. ADEPA'S REPORT ON PRESS FREEDOM, WHICH WAS COVERED RATHER GINGERLY BY THE MEDIA, CITED WHAT IT CONSIDERED TO BE A NUMBER OF RECENT VIOLATIONS OF PRESS FREEDOM, INCLUDING THE KIDNAPPINGS (DISAPPEARANCES) OF SEVERAL PROMINENT JOURNALISTS AMONG THEM EX-PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY EDGARDO SAJON, POLITICAL NEWSLETTER ULTIMA CLAVE EDITOR RODOLFO FERNANDEZ PONDAL AND LA OPINION (TRENQUE LAUQUEN) EDITOR JUAN RAMON NAZAR. IN ADDITION, THE REPORT CRITICIZED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS CLOSING (TEMPORARILY OR PERMANENTLY) THE NEWSPAPERS EPOCA (CORRIENTES) AND EL INDEPENDIENTE (LA RIOJA) AND "ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVENTIONS" AGAINST LA OPINION (BUENOS AIRES) AND DIARIO NORTE (RESISTENCIA). ADEPA REPORTED THAT THE "ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVENTIONS" WERE PARTICULARLY ALARMING BECAUSE "IN SPITE OF THEIR MERELY ADMINISTRATIVE APPEARANCE THEY REVEAL A NEW, SUBTLE WAY OF MODIFYING THE ORIENTATION OF THE SANCTIONED NEWSPAPERS..."

4. GOVERNMENT OBSERVERS WHO ATTENDED THE ADEPA MEETING STRONGLY DISAGREED WITH THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS RESOLUTION. CORONEL (RET.) PEDRO QUIROGA, THE MILITARY INTERVENTOR AT TELAM, THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT NEWS AGENCY, ARGUED, AS THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONTENTED ALL ALONG, THAT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS SHOULD NOT FAVOR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. HE ADDED THAT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SUBVERSION SEDITIONOUS PUBLICATIONS CAN BE CLOSED. ADEPA REPLIED THAT ALLEGEDLY SEDITIONOUS EDITORS CAN BE PROSECUTED, BUT THEIR PUBLICATIONS SHOULD NOT BE CLOSED.

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5. DURING THE ADEPA MEETING ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL VIOLA PRIVATELY INFORMED ADEPA PRESIDENT JUAN VALMAGGIA THAT HE WOULD PROVIDE HIM WITH THE NAMES AND REASONS FOR DETENTION OF ALL JOURNALISTS BEING HELD BY THE GOVERNMENT. WHETHER THIS WAS AN ATTEMPT TO ASSUAGE ADEPA AND HELP TONE DOWN ITS FREEDOM OF THE PRESS RESOLUTION IS NOT CLEAR.

6. THE GOA'S PRINCIPAL MEANS OF CONTROLLING THE MEDIA IS

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COMMUNIQUE 19 ISSUED ON MARCH 24, 1976, WHICH DECLARED THAT "ANYONE WHO THROUGH ANY MEDIUM WHATSOEVER DEFENDS, DIVULGES OR PROPAGATES ANNOUNCEMENTS OR VIEWS COMING FROM OR ATTRIBUTED TO ILLICIT ORGANIZATIONS OR PERSONS

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OR GROUPS NOTORIOUSLY DEDICATED TO SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES OR TO TERRORISM WILL BE SUBJECT TO INDEFINITE DETENTION. ANYONE WHO THROUGH ANY MEDIUM WHATSOEVER DEFENDS, PROPAGATES OR DIVULGES NEWS, COMMUNIQUE OR VIEWS WITH THE PURPOSE OF DISRUPTING, PREJUDICING OR LESSENING THE PRESTIGE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ARMED FORCES WILL BE SUBJECT TO DETENTION FOR A PERIOD OF UP TO 10 YEARS."

7. ON APRIL 22, 1976, THE GOA ISSUED A DEGREE STATING THAT "IT IS FORBIDDEN TO REPORT, COMMENT OR MAKE REFERENCE TO SUBJECTS RELATED TO SUBVERSIVE INCIDENTS, THE APPEARANCE OF BODIES AND THE DEATHS OF SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS AND/OR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED OR SECURITY FORCES, UNLESS THESE ARE ANNOUNCED BY A RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL SOURCE. THIS INCLUDES KIDNAPPINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES."

8. IN ADDITION, THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARIAT ISSUED AN INFORMAL "STYLE MANUAL" INDICATED PREFERRED TERMINOLOGY IN ARGENTINE NEWSPEAK, "PRISONER" IS A "CAPTURED DELINQUENT;" "REVOLUTIONARY WAR" IS "SUBVERSION;" THE "ORGANIZATION DECLARED ILLEGAL" (A EUPHEMISM FOR THE MONTONEROS) IS "A BAND OF SUBVERSIVE DELINQUENTS SELF-NAMED MONTONEROS."

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9. THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF THESE REGULATIONS PLUS CONSTANT CALLS TO THE MEDIA FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS OFFICE WITH "HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS" ABOUT WHAT SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T BE COVERED AND HOW MUCH PLAY TO GIVE CERTAIN STORIES RESULTS IN FAIRLY EFFECTIVE GOA CONTROL OF THE PRESS. IT ALSO ENCOURAGES CONSIDERABLE SELF CENSORSHIP. EXCEPT FOR THREE PRIVATELY-OWNED RADIO STATIONS, TV AND RADIO ARE TOTALLY CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

10. COMMENT: THIS WAS ADEPA'S SECOND STRONG STATEMENT ON PRESS FREEDOM SINCE THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT TOOK OVER IN MARCH, 1976. LAST YEAR'S ASSEMBLY CHIDED THE GOVERNMENT FOR BEING "THIN-SKINNED TO CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM" AND CONCLUDED THAT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN ARGENTINA EXISTS "IN SPITE OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO THE CONTRARY." ADEPA HAS BEEN ONE OF THE FEW VOICES ALONG WITH THE BUENOS AIRES HERALD AND LA PRENSA REGULARLY TO DEFEND PRESS FREEDOM HERE.
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